



A Scoping Project: Exploring Place-based Collaboration for the Provision of Environmental and Sustainability Education



Prepared for: WAI Wānaka

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Executive Summary

Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are symptoms of the impacts caused by modern civilisation on Earth's lifegiving properties and systems. If humanity and the rest of nature is to thrive, we must change the values and norms underpinning our ways of living. Such a future can only be secured through transformational social and economic change, and in democratic nations like Aotearoa New Zealand, education has a paramount role to play.

Education built on connection and love place empowers communities to take-action for a more sustainable and regenerative future. Education of this kind is the responsibility of whole communities: tākata whenua, organisations, businesses, community groups, and individuals, all working together. The *Collaborative Community Education Model* as described in this report (p. 8) provides an example of a framework enabling school-community partnerships.

A four-month scoping project explored the potential for taking a greater collaborative approach for the delivery of environmental and sustainability education, through both the formal and non-formal education sectors, in Wānaka and surrounds of the Upper Clutha. This report draws together the information and feedback collected through the project, highlighting emergent ideas, themes and recommendations for moving forward.

The project's participants were comprised predominantly of local teachers and representatives from environmental education organisations. Overall, the findings highlight many individual and community outcomes to be gained by increasing networking, coordination and collaboration through the development of effective stakeholder partnerships. This is particularly relevant to the array of environmental education organisations in the region that predominantly operate independently of one other at present.

Key recommendations going forward as proposed by the author are:

1. Work with the willing – as based on a set of pre-determined expectations for 2023;
2. Establish ways of working – using stakeholder feedback in conjunction with 'key ingredients' for effective partnerships;
3. Coordinate focused, manageable action – by collectively determining the amount of collaborative work that is feasible for 2023; and
4. Strategise for increasing organisational capacity and capability 2024+ - positing the centrality, coherence, and coordination of educational efforts as part of a long-term response to the socio-ecological reality of our times.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the representatives from all the educational organisations and education providers who supported this project through their participation. And with special thanks to representatives from the following organisations for their extra efforts: Enviroschools Otago, GROW Wānaka, Otago Regional Council, Te Kākano Aotearoa Trust, Wao and WAI Wānaka.

Terminology used in this report

Educational organisations refer to any early childhood centres and schools.

Education providers refer to any organisations that provide educational organisations with environmental and sustainability education support and/or projects. This may be in the form of expertise, resources, funding and/or the provision of real-life learning opportunities.

Working group refers to the representatives from the education providers that took the lead to collectively plan for and undertake works affiliated with this scoping project.

Formal education refers to learning opportunities that take place in schools, universities and training institutions.

Non-formal education refers to learning opportunities that take place outside of the formal education sector, such as at home, workplace and through the wider-community.

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1. Introduction

Background

The Queenstown Lakes district has experienced significant economic and population growth in recent decades. While appearing pristine, the district faces complex environmental, land management and sustainability challenges due to the combined effects of climate change, escalating pest problems, tourism, land use change and urban development. The evidence is clear that fundamental, system-wide changes to societal structures and ways of living are essential to achieving a healthy, vibrant future for community (Perkins et al., 2019; Queenstown Lakes District Council, 2022).

WAI Wānaka is one of a number of local organisations working to enact these changes, with a purpose of accelerating locally led action to deliver healthy ecosystems and community wellbeing. This charitable organisation aims to improve ecosystem health and community wellbeing, reverse biodiversity loss and keep the waters of the Upper Clutha catchment healthy (Figure 1). WAI Wānaka’s team is on the ground, working with tākata whenua, community and catchment groups/organisations, landowners, businesses, and educational organisations through a wide range of initiatives and aligned projects. Building partnerships and working collaboratively is a cornerstone value to achieving its purpose.

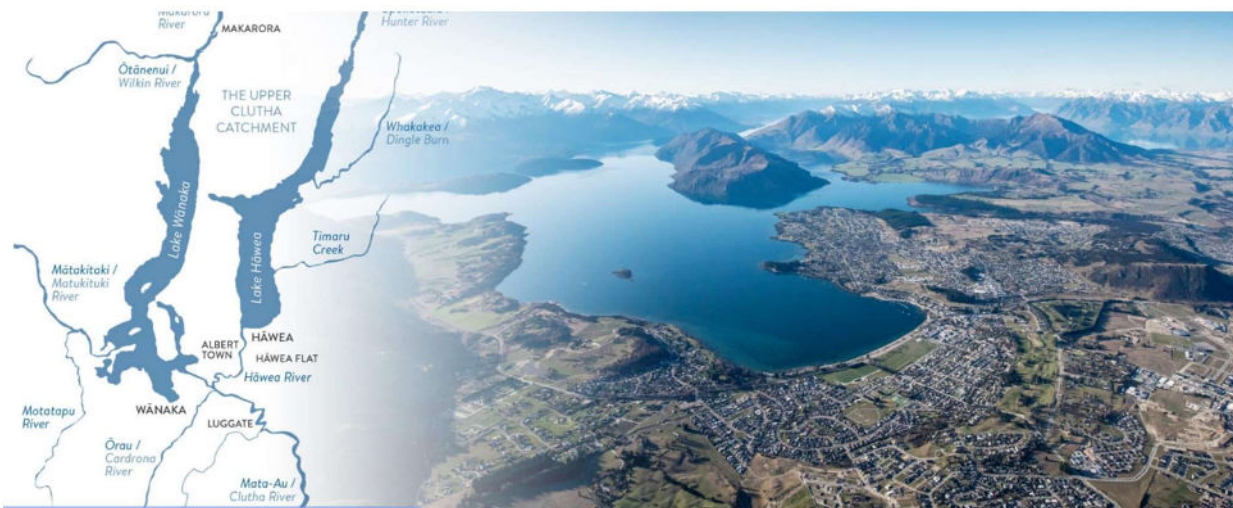


Figure 1: Aerial view of Wānaka township, Roys Bay, Lake Wānaka, and Lake Hāwea in the distance (Sourced: WAI Wānaka, 2023)

As a part of its ‘core work’, WAI Wānaka’s current educational profile focuses mainly on a school’s programme linking urban and rural communities, of which a priority learning

outcome is to develop awareness and understanding that water is an important resource that needs looking after. WAI Wānaka takes an enduring approach encompassing all connections to the land and the water bodies within the catchment. In this way, WAI Wānaka acknowledges the significance of the interconnections of all things at place: between people and the water, people and the land, people with people.

Based on the theme of interconnectedness, WAI Wānaka initiated a scoping project mid-2022 in order to explore the potential of improving networking, coordination and collaboration for environmental and sustainability education amongst educational organisations and education providers working in the Upper Clutha, most based in Wānaka. Enabled through a grant from Weave, this project is well-aligned with WAI Wānaka's "whole of community, whole of basin" approach which seeks to protect and enhance the region's ecosystems through building and maintaining multiple stakeholder relationships.

Context of the project

Based on this background, I was approached by WAI Wānaka in July 2022 in regards to a number of initiatives I have been involved with to improve networking, coordination and collaboration in the environmental and sustainability education sector across Aotearoa New Zealand. Of particular interest to WAI Wānaka was the Collaborative Community Education Model that emerged from research I undertook, in conjunction with the Department of Conservation, for the conservation education pilot project of *Kids Greening Taupō*¹ (<https://www.kidsgreeningtaupo.org.nz>). The affiliated research findings (DePetris, 2016; DePetris & Eames, 2018) and summary guides (Department of Conservation, 2017a, 2017b), in conjunction with on-going anecdotal evidence from other individuals and organisations using the model across the country, demonstrate a number of key 'ingredients' for successful place-based collaboration.

Following these discussions, I became involved in a four-month scoping project which entailed collecting and analysing feedback from educational organisations and educational providers, as well as presenting to potential stakeholders about the Collaborative Community Education Model. This report draws together the information and feedback collected through the scoping project, highlights emergent ideas and themes, and provides recommendations

¹ The *Kids Greening Taupō* programme acknowledges the origin of the *Collaborative Community Education Model* as beginning with learnings shared by past and present community participants of the *Kids Restore the Kepler* programme in Te Anau. Following this initial sharing, an 18-month *Kids Greening Taupō* pilot project was launched in 2015, which included a research-based evaluation and other publications as referenced in this report, and are publically accessible as a means to helping inform other place-based collaborations. Through a Creative Commons Licence, the *Stakeholder and Teacher Guides (2016)*, as published by the Department of Conservation, are also free to use and share.

for next steps towards increasing networking, coordination and collaboration for environmental and sustainability education in Wānaka.

Overview of Report

Set out below is a summary of what is included in this report:

- The role of education for a regenerative, more sustainable future;
- An overview of the Collaborative Community Education Model;
- Steps undertaken in this project that enabled the exploration of place-based collaboration for environmental and sustainability education in Wānaka;
- Outcomes and findings of the scoping project; and
- Recommendations going forward.

2. Education as key to a sustainable future

We live in an unprecedented time when humankind has become the dominant force in shaping the evolution of all species on Earth (Lövbrand et al., 2015). Referred to by scientists as ‘the Anthropocene’, this is an unpredictable and dangerous time as humanity is undermining the planetary life-support systems upon which it depends (Steffen et al., 2018). Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are consequences of our species recklessness.

Depending on the collective actions of humanity, future conditions on our planet could be either beneficial or hostile for life and wellbeing (Folke et al., 2021). Whether humanity has the collective wisdom to navigate the Anthropocene to sustain a liveable biosphere for people and the rest of life with which we share the planet and depend upon is yet to be determined.

How to secure a regenerative, sustainable future is the most formidable challenge to face humanity. Without a doubt, life-long education is a cornerstone of the social change necessary for solving wicked², socio-ecological problems and ensuring the health of the people and planet. The provision of life-long learning opportunities through both formal education and non-formal education has long been a tenant of the field (UNESCO, 1978). To support what the situation so urgently requires, contemporary calls by organisations such as UNESCO and UNEP stress the need for ‘environmental education to be a core component of all education systems at all levels by 2025’ (UNESCO, 2021b). Environmental and

² ‘Wicked problems’ are commonly referred to in both educational and scientific literature. This concept is used to describe problems like climate change and global inequality that have no direct, easy solutions as they span multiple disciplinary boundaries and are highly complex and value-laden. Wicked problems result in a less stable and increasingly unpredictable future that humans must face, cope with and ultimately resolve.

sustainability education across all disciplines and sectors is paramount if we are to achieve the necessary paradigm shift in our ways of thinking and living upon which our survival, and that of future generations, depends upon. The time to learn and act collectively is now.

Environmental and sustainability education is an aspirational field comprised of individuals and organisations striving to make the world a better place (Clark et al., 2020). A recent study of environmental and sustainability professionals and leaders summarised the core consensual outcomes of the field as this:

Environmental education works to move people to action for the tangible benefit of the environment and humanity. To realize these benefits, people must connect experientially with the environment, learn needed skills, and understand the complicated social and cultural connections between humanity and the natural environment (Clark et al., 2020, p. 381).

Research tells us that effective environmental and sustainability education depends on the utilisation of real-life contexts that offer action-oriented and participatory opportunities (Ardoin et al., 2020). A place-based approach underpins these opportunities as they utilise school-wide initiatives and local communities as a primary teaching and learning resource (Kerrigan, 2018). In this way, place-based education attempts to break down the four walls of the traditional classroom by enabling students to spend time outdoors, building relationships with the people, non-human species and local geographies of their 'place' (DePetris, 2022). Education through a place-based approach is crucial if we are to foster connection and care for the social and natural environments in which we live, alongside of developing the local knowledge and skills necessary to take action for regeneration and sustainability.

Progress towards the audacious, amorphous, and long-term goal of making the world a better place through education is only achievable if there is system-wide capacity and capability. Educational organisations alone simply do not have all the 'in-house' resources necessary for identifying and integrating real-life, place-based learning contexts (Bolstad et al., 2012), nor do individual providers always have the capacity to support (DePetris, 2022). As such, the emergence and enactment of the Collaborative Community Education Model was a response to these system-wide barriers in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, offering a framework for improving place-based collaboration between schools and community for integrating real-life learning contexts.

3. The Collaborative Community Education Model (CCEM)

Within a collaborative partnership model, stakeholders³ agree to cooperate in order to achieve specified outcomes that might otherwise have been difficult to achieve independently (Wei-Skillern & Silver, 2013). In this way, new value (i.e., impact, outcomes and outputs) are created together, rather than a mere exchange of something between partners (i.e. getting something back in exchange for putting something in) (Kanter, 1994). Furthermore, the chance of duplicating individualised efforts is minimised by working through partnerships.

The CCEM provides an enabling framework that connects stakeholders at 'place' - educational organisations, education providers, businesses, community groups and individuals. Through a real-life learning context, stakeholders work together towards a common purpose from which educational, social, and environmental outcomes are achieved. As shown in Figure 2, the key components of the CCEM are:

- A local environmental/conservation/sustainability project or issue;
- Schools within a geographical community (from early childhood through to secondary);
- Partnering organisations, businesses and/or experts;
- Education coordinator(s);
- Student Leadership Team (SLT); and
- Strategic Leadership Group (SLG).

Education programmes based on this model utilise the following principles:

- Authentic learning opportunities;
- Collaboration – across year levels, between schools and with the wider community;
- Student led – an ethos of 'students being in the driver's seat';
- Vertical approach – a continuous (cross-curriculum) learning journey; and
- Teacher professional development and support.

Kids Greening Taupō (<https://www.kidsgreeningtaupo.org.nz/>) is one such programme developed through the CCEM. The conception of this programme was based on the mission of *Greening Taupō* (<https://www.greeningtaupo.org.nz/>) to establish ecological corridors throughout the town for the benefit of people and wildlife. Through *Kids Greening Taupō* local teachers, students and the wider-community are provided with hands-on opportunities

³ Organisations that join together in partnership are referred to here as stakeholders, meaning they have a stake or interest in the partnership.

that enable them to contribute to this mission, while teacher professional development helps teachers integrate this authentic context into their respective curriculum.

The CCEM is not meant to be a prescriptive 'recipe' for developing a collaborative community education project. It is simply a tool to support stakeholders with respect to planning, implementing and maintaining projects based on the utilisation of local, real-life learning projects. It is expected that each resulting programme will be unique because every community has their own respective environmental and sustainability issues to resolve and taoka to be treasured. Programme development will also be flavoured by the different types of stakeholders that participate.

True to this intent, the CCEM serves as an underpinning framework to a number programmes and initiatives across the motu, including the *Kids Greening Taupō*, the *Taupō Environmental Education Collaborative* (<https://www.eectaupo.co.nz>), *Town Belt Kaitiaki* (<https://townbeltkaitiaki.nz>) and *Te Ara Taiao* (<https://www.sustainabletaranaki.org.nz/te-ara-taiao-program>). As demonstrated through the praxis of these programmes, the CCEM is also a useful tool for complementing other environmental and sustainability education programmes such as the nationally renowned Enviroschools programme. Since its inception, the CCEM has been used to support place-based collaboration, either in the form of school-community partnerships, or otherwise, to improve networking, coordination and collaboration amongst educational providers. A brief rationale behind these objectives is provided below.

Purpose one: Fostering school-community partnerships (SCP's)

The development of the CCEM heeds the call from 21st Century education theory for collaborative partnerships to be made between schools and community, or in other words, the development of SCPs. Such partnerships have long been advocated for by educational scholars for providing students with real-life learning experiences and authentic knowledge-building opportunities (Bolstad et al., 2012) through inquiry and taking action for local projects. SCP's are more meaningful and relevant than that of traditional book or teacher-driven learning approaches, and therefore the benefits are promoted as (1) improving student academic and personal success, (2) enhancing school quality and (3) supporting community cohesiveness and tangible outcomes (McMillan & Binns, 2011; Sanders & Lewis, 2005).

Although the benefits are reputable, a number of interrelated constraints and barriers have led to an intermittent use of SCP's (DePetris, 2016; Kerrigan, 2018). However, as the educational landscape continues to evolve and change, so does the prioritisation of SCPs. For example, the Ministry of Education's relatively recent promotion and support for Local Curriculum Design (Ministry of Education, 2021) has meant that schools are increasingly

focusing on developing learning contexts through the people, places and resources within one's community, inherently implying the development of SCP's.

Collaborative Community Education Model



Key strategic roles

Programme strategy development and leadership by two important groups:

<p>1. The Strategic Leadership Group – comprised of representatives from partnering organisations.</p>	<p>2. The Student Leadership Team – nominated students from participating schools.</p>
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The Coordinator role is essential to facilitate interactions between the schools and community partners to achieve the programme goals, as identified in the strategy.

Figure 2: The Collaborative Community Education Model (Sourced: DePetris, 2016)

Purpose two: Improve networking, coordination and collaboration between providers

Initially, the CCEM was developed as a tool to support the development of SCP's. However, it has become apparent that the model is also being used in Aotearoa New Zealand as a framework to specifically improve networking, coordination and collaboration amongst providers. This application of the CCEM has merit as traditionally education providers have tended to work independently (Bolstad et al., 2015), mainly due to the fact that these organisations typically employ relatively few staff; often on a part-time basis (DePetris, 2022). However, this landscape is also changing. With a recent injection of funding, the New Zealand Association of Environmental Education (NZAEE) has undertaken a strategic overhaul through which one new aim seeks to support more networking and collaboration at local, regional and national levels (<https://www.nzaee.org.nz/>).

4. Process

This report summarises the findings of a scoping project to explore place-based collaboration for the provision of environmental and sustainability education in Wānaka. The broad timeline and stages of the project are outlined in Table 1 below, with all supporting detail provided for in the Appendices.

Table 1: Timeline and stakeholder engagement opportunities of the scoping project

Stakeholder Engagement	Summary
August 2022	
Identification of stakeholders	Details of potential stakeholders was collated by WAI Wānaka, comprised of all educational organisations in Wānaka, and education providers (governmental and non-governmental) that support environmental and sustainability education in the Queenstown district (Appendix A). A total of 15 educational organisations and 19 education providers were identified. The educational organisations included 1 secondary school, 5 primary schools, 8 early childhood centres and 1 alternative education provider.

Stakeholder Engagement	Summary
September 2022	
Working group	A small working group was established, members comprised of representatives from four key education providers that support educational organisations on a regular basis: Enviroschools Otago, Otago Regional Council, Te Kāhano Aotearoa Trust, and WAI Wānanka. Another member of the working party included a new resident to Wānaka, who had previously worked for a CCEM initiative in the North Island, and is now employed by NZAEE.
Morning tea visits	Morning tea visits were made to the schools that accepted an invitation from the working group. Through these visits, schools were made aware of the working party, as well as providing a ‘heads-up’ about the upcoming on-line survey and teacher professional development opportunity (referred to below as a Local Day Hui) to explore place-based collaboration.
Online survey	An online survey was sent to all key contacts as listed on the potential stakeholder database, asking stakeholders about their respective current use/involvement with environmental and sustainability education, their aspirations for the discipline, and any resources/support required. Two slightly different surveys were designed, one for educational organisations and the other for education providers (Appendix B).
Planning for Local Day Hui	The working party regularly met in person and through zoom to collaboratively plan the Local Day Hui. The Wānaka Local Day was one of a series of hui’s held around the motu as part of the NZAEE National Conference 2022.

Stakeholder Engagement	Summary
October 2022	
Local Day Hui	All educational organisations and providers were invited to this event. As planned for by the working group, the hui offered a networking opportunity, and an opportunity to undertake a 'blue-sky' visioning process about increasing coordination and collaboration in the environmental and sustainability education space. Hui Invitation (Appendix C), agenda (Appendix D).
Evaluation of Local Day Hui	Feedback collected from the hui was collated and summarised. A copy of the blank evaluation template and the summary of responses (e.g., Local Day Evaluation) is provided in Appendix E. Ideas and responses from the blue-sky brainstorming session are provided at Appendix F.
November/December 2022	
Working Group Meetings	The evaluation summary was used by the working group as a foundational discussion document to guide further work for place-based collaboration going forward.
Interviews	Each member of the working group, and two other education provider representatives, individually participated in an online zoom interview with the author of this report. Guiding questions for interviews (Appendix G) helped explore more deeply their perceptions about place-based collaboration for the provision of environmental and sustainability education.

5. Outcomes and Findings

Participation

Approximately one-half of the educational organisations and education providers participated in at least one of the opportunities offered through the scoping project. Overall, representatives from 7 of the 14 educational organisations, and 10 of the 19 providers, participated. A summary of attendance is provided below.

Table 2: Stakeholder engagement participation

Stakeholder engagement opportunity	Number of participating organisations	Total number of representatives
Morning tea visits	5 educational organisations	Whole staff events
Online survey	6 educational organisations	8 teachers
	9 education providers	10 representatives
Local Day Hui	3 educational organisations	6 teachers
	9 education providers	12 representatives

Overall, the feedback collected from the scoping project indicated a high level of energy and enthusiasm for increasing networking, coordination and collaboration for environmental and sustainability education. The development of the database of potential stakeholders and the online survey was useful for providing a foundation understanding of key contacts, and respective modus operandi and aspirations; while feedback from the hui and interviews found strong consensus that increasing place-based collaboration will benefit the praxis of environmental and sustainability education in Wānaka. Through both the survey and hui, participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to connect with a wide array of individuals and organisations for thinking about what may be possible in this space.

Survey feedback

Place-based learning was identified as a priority for all participating educational organisations. These organisations perceived critical importance for getting outside and making the most of local, real-life contexts through support from experts and the wider community. Although these organisations provided plenty of examples of this type of learning already happening, there was a strong desire for wanting to do even more, in terms of both breadth and depth. As explained by this participant:

Through our school-wide practices of place-based learning, environmental and sustainable learning, inquiry learning and wellbeing- we are always looking for more opportunities to engage our children in learning that is relevant and authentic and connects to the world they live in.

While another participant simply said:

We want to do more in this space, and have very enthusiastic students.

Through the survey, specific calls were made for opportunities that enable educational organisations to become kaitiaki of specific areas/projects of relevance, including learning more about the Māori history of Wānaka.

We would love to learn more from the experts, continue making connections with our community and allowing our children to explore more specific areas that have relevance. We would also love to learn more about the Māori history of Wānaka and putting names to the places we are learning about.

Lastly, feedback highlighted the importance that learning is driven through a student-led approach and include sustainability initiatives on school grounds.

The children have designed a vision wish list and it would be good to see some of these things become part of our school, opportunities for more outings in the community, to create a nursery, etc.

Aligning with this feedback, participating provider organisations identified a wide range of environmental and sustainability education projects and support that they provide for schools and the wider community. The majority of feedback collected from the survey made clear that many providers feel they have more work to do to fully realise the potential of their own individual education programmes, but nevertheless, they also highlighted the need to develop and strengthen relationships with other organisations simultaneously. Like the participant below, who spoke about the benefits of working collaboratively in terms of providing a more holistic educational experience, as well as ensuring that the programmes are developmentally appropriate.

We could improve collaboration between the various environmental education groups as we each focus on different areas. It would also be great to have a bigger picture and understand better the needs each age group has (i.e. we don't teach and do the same activities with pre-schoolers and high school students).

Working together through a more structured approach and offering “enduring community projects” were some other ideas suggested by providers.

Local Day Hui feedback

The Local Day Hui was held over a five-hour period on a weekday over the Term 3 school holiday period. Although the hui spanned a relatively short amount of time, there was much sharing and learning about a wide variety of topics and experiences. In brief, the hui included:

- speakers about local Māori history, youth-led initiatives and inspirational stories of place-based collaboration across Aotearoa New Zealand;
- experiences for connecting to nature and exploring affiliated teaching and learning approaches; and
- a blue-sky brainstorming session for sharing what is already happening in the local context and brainstorming how this work can be built upon further.

The hui itinerary undertaken is shown in Appendix D.

During the blue-sky brainstorming session, participants recorded their ideas and thoughts in relation to the following three questions:

1. What are the opportunities and great things happening here already?
2. What could be? Consider what students care about, hope for and/or is referred to your school/centre/organisation’s vision.
- 3a. What are some needs/obstacles? What’s missing or preventing this work from thriving?
- 3b. What are some solutions/support?

Collated responses are shown in Appendix F.

The blue-sky brainstorming session revealed that Wānaka has a wide array of education providers, some well-established while others are relatively new organisations. All provide opportunities to get involved with real-life projects. The education programmes cover a wide spectrum of environmental and sustainability themes, meaning that collectively these organisations could offer holistic learning opportunities for developing awareness and knowledge in relation to interconnections of all beings and things at place.

In terms of what the participants saw as future potential, emphasis was given to developing projects that are relevant to the educational organisations and make use of local green spaces on an on-going basis. Increasing the edibility of landscapes, in terms of both foraging and growing food, was favoured by many participants.

The brainstorming session highlighted that participants perceive significant obstacles to collaboration, including a lack of awareness of providers' offerings and cohesion between stakeholders. Participants identified the need for a shared platform/resource for improving awareness of offerings and opportunities, while some were keen to see a community-based coordinator/facilitator put in place for making connections, coordinating and driving this initiative. Securing on-going funding, capacity and energy for maintaining momentum were deemed other critical challenges.

Participants believe there is still much untapped potential in terms of support from some education providers, especially Queenstown Lakes District Council. Feedback from this session highlighted robust consensus that a shared calendar of programme opportunities, including teacher professional learning development, would be a useful asset going forward. Feedback from both the survey and hui indicated a prioritisation for deepening teacher awareness, understanding and skills for utilising place-based contexts. As shared by a teacher:

For us it's about educating our teachers because we can't always have access to the experts...to share some tips, information and tricks that we can then do on our own excursions.

Measuring impact and outcomes of programmes was also noted as something that could help this initiative adapt and improve over time.

The hui concluded with a reflection opportunity through a written evaluation template (Appendix E). Evaluatory feedback collected indicated that participants were extremely satisfied with the hui and had a strong desire for more networking, coordination, collaboration opportunities. All participants expressed the desire to work together more often to forge ongoing SCPs. Ideas for partnerships were expressed in a variety of ways including: educational organisations working together, educational organisations and education providers working together, and education providers working with other education providers. A summary of the evaluatory feedback is also provided in Appendix E.

[Interview feedback](#)

Following the Local Day Hui, an individual interview was conducted with each member of the working group, as well as two other provider representatives. In sum, interviews were undertaken with representatives from: Enviroschools Otago, GROW Wānaka, Otago Regional Council, Te Kākano Aotearoa Trust, WAI Wānaka, and WAO. The interviews were conducted by the author of this report and were undertaken through zoom, each taking approximately one-hour. The guiding questions for the interviews (Appendix G) mainly

focused on participants' perspectives of the historical and present-day provision of environmental and sustainability education in Wānaka, organisational aspirations for the discipline at place, and perceived challenges needing to be worked through. The interview feedback is collectively summarised below.

[Present-day environmental and sustainability education context](#)

All interviewees commented about the relatively recent increase in the number of local education providers, and most made mention of not having direct, regular contact with one another. In terms of the work these providers do in the formal education sector, one representative described it as “siloes, ad hoc, with no discussion about the overlaps of our work”; while another commented that they felt like “everyone was having different conversations with schools”. However, in relation to the non-formal education sector, two interviewees highlighted the large number of community education events organised by multiple providers in Wānaka every year that successfully bring together individuals, businesses, groups and organisations.

[Aspirational environmental and sustainability education context](#)

Overall, all interviewees aspired to developing what one interviewee described as a more “cohesive, coordinated and collaborative group”. Thematic categories about outcomes, outputs, challenges and enablers of place-based collaboration emerged from interviewees' responses. Key themes in relation to these categories are outlined below.

Big picture outcomes:

- Effective place-based collaboration;
- Shared understandings (i.e., both in terms of the partnership functioning and what makes for effective environmental and sustainability education);
- High-level of trust between organisations through less competition;
- A more coordinated approach to communicating with schools and the wider community (i.e., not doubling up on efforts);
- Increased awareness across the whole community about how to get involved in environmental and sustainability education and where to seek support when necessary;
- Increased teacher confidence and capacity for integrating the discipline;
- More funding and resources for supporting education providers and educational organisations;
- Visible and holistic learning linkages between different educational levels and topics (e.g., ece, primary and secondary);

- Balanced provision of community-wide and school-based education opportunities/projects;
- Increased people/nature connectedness; and
- Communities motivated and empowered to take action through increased levels of awareness, connection, knowledge and skills.

Deliverable outputs:

- A formalised partnership underpinned by a shared purpose and language;
- A feasible allocation of time and space for place-based collaboration;
- Working group representatives are replaced when they depart from their respective organisational role;
- Regular, face-to-face meetings between providers are well-structured (i.e., not wasting time);
- Regular feedback is sought and 'mapping' undertaken of what teachers need/want and what providers can offer;
- The provision of a sharing platform (e.g., website and/or calendar) for increasing visibility and awareness about opportunities;
- More project-based opportunities for both schools and community-wide, that
 - connect and help people love their place, and build empowerment through taking action,
 - are real-life, meaningful, experiential, and on-going,
 - are delivered through a more holistic approach (in terms of both topic and ages),
 - enable participant to have fun and build a positive vibe in the community,
 - get teachers and students outside the classroom more often, getting their hands dirty;
- Professional learning development opportunities for teachers; and
- Educational organisations also collaborating and sharing with one another.

Challenges:

- Limited capacity within provider roles;
- Competition between providers in term of programme offerings and funding availability;
- Establishing an effective method of communication between all stakeholders;
- Determining what schools want/need and not exploiting them for purposes of providers;
- Unknown tensions that might develop between organisations; and
- Maintaining focus and momentum.

Enablers for success:

- An enduring partnership based on organisational buy-in;
- Effective ways of working and clear communication between all stakeholders (e.g., providers and schools);
- Working to expertise and strengths;
- Leveraging off already in-situ opportunities like community events and top-down initiatives (e.g., Ministry of Education’s Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum); and
- Increased funding and role capacity.

6. Summary and Recommendations

Feedback collected through this scoping project clearly indicates the need and desire of stakeholders for increasing place-based collaboration with respect to environmental and sustainability education in Wānaka. Achieving this endeavour will enable educational organisations and education providers to network, coordinate and work together more often, helping to minimise the duplication of individualised efforts and improve the delivery of effective environmental and sustainability education.

The educational organisations that participated in this project highly value place-based learning as a fundamental component of their respective curricula. Teachers are keen to integrate more real-life projects into teaching and learning, both within school-grounds and beyond school boundaries. As part of this, they prioritised “enduring” projects, especially those that make use of local green spaces that are relevant to children and young people. Teachers also asked for more professional development, and are especially keen to learn more about the history of local places through a te ao Māori lens.

Representatives from the educational organisations indicated SCP’s as a crucial mechanism to achieving place-based learning. In this respect, they signalled the need for increasing awareness about who the provider organisations are and what respective programme offerings/support is available. The development of a sharing platform/resource for showcasing the environmental and sustainability education opportunities on offer was considered as a particularly important objective. Awareness of the available opportunities and support will be helpful to increasing connectivity and building the relationships necessary to develop SCP’s.

Like the educational organisations, the providers also identified the need for improved place-based collaboration. Prior to the formation of the working group, providers described the nature of their work as facilitators and educators in the formal school sector as typically

undertaken through a 'silo'ed' approach, with communication between stakeholders being intermittent and ad hoc. The working group's summation is that, with increased networking, coordination and collaboration, stakeholders will be able to do more, to a higher standard. The perceived beneficial outcomes, as derived from key outputs delivered through a more collaborative approach, are identified on pg. 18-19 of this report.

At this stage, the working group is acting through an informal partnership structure meaning a few organisational representatives have come together to work for the common cause of improving place-based collaboration. With commitment of some time and energy from within the current roles of providers, increased networking, coordination and collaboration is feasible. It is from this context that recommendations #1-3 as described below are based upon.

In acknowledgement of the ambitious local environmental and social targets as proposed by the *Climate and Biodiversity Plan 2022-2025* (Queenstown Lakes District Council, 2022), consideration should also be given to securing additional funding to build further organisational capacity and capability into educational partnerships as outlined by recommendation #4.

Recommendation 1: Work with the willing

Through this project, a number of potential stakeholders were identified, a working group established and feedback collected about their perspectives and objectives for improving place-based collaboration.

At present, the working group consists of five representatives from the following organisations: Enviroschools Otago, Otago Regional Council, Te Kāhano Aotearoa Trust, and WAI Wānaka. The working group should consider inviting other significant education providers to join this group, such as WAO, Wastebusters, Queenstown Lakes District Council and GROW Wānaka. Tidying up the membership of the partnership will help prevent further duplication of efforts, such as the work soon to commence for planning the UN Youth Summit hosted by WAO.

To deliver on the feedback collected from the scoping project, further commitment from the working party is required. The expectations for commitment need to be clearly understood and agreed upon by all organisational representatives. Since many in the working party have indicated that they still have much work to do on their own respective education programmes, the expectations of what can be achieved through collective efforts this year should be kept manageable for all representatives.

As such, a commitment to attend a half-day workshop on a monthly basis for the remainder of the year is recommended. Through this allocation of time, the following objectives could be targeted:

- Establish ways of working (recommendation #2);
- Coordinate, plan and deliver a selection of key outputs (recommendation #3); and
- Strategise for increasing partnership capacity and capability 2024+ (recommendation #4).

Recommendation 2: Establish ways of working

Over the past few decades, the intent to build partnerships has gained traction in order to decrease inefficiencies that arise from independent ways of working amongst organisations. Arising from this has been the emergence of a significant body of principles and best practices across multiple academic and grey literature about building partnerships and achieving collective impact, many of which share similar conditions (Biggar et al., 2017). A selection of shared conditions that have underpinned initiatives as based on the CCEM are:

- A common purpose and long-term vision;
- Working to strengths on mutually beneficial activities;
- Continuous and effective communication; and
- A shared evaluation system, including implementation of feedback.

With respect to this scoping project, the aim has been to explore the common purpose of improving place-based collaboration for the provision of environmental and sustainability education in Wānaka. Securing a long-term vision for the partnership means that organisational buy-in is obtained, which ensures that representatives on the working group who leave their role are replaced.

Through the interviews, representatives highlighted the need for working to expertise/strengths through which roles and responsibilities are well-defined. In this way, stakeholders share their expert knowledge and skills in the most appropriate way. For example, those in the working group with curriculum knowledge and pedagogical expertise are drawn on for ensuring the development of mutually reinforcing activities and projects for youth and the formal school sector.

Communication that is ongoing and effective ensures that the working group has mutual understanding of the project's purpose, vision and ways of working, while all stakeholders are made aware of opportunities and achievements. The feedback from some providers also

highlighted the need for collaborative efforts to be guided by what schools want to do, and to abide by the “less hui, more do’ey” motto.

A system for progress monitoring and evaluation can foster a positive culture of celebrating success, and therefore, is important for maintaining partnership momentum and enthusiasm. Making space and time for evaluation and reflection purposes should be set aside for later this year, preferably October and November. This will enable the working group to build on successes achieved and explore challenges faced by all stakeholders in terms of the partnership structure itself, and the collective, on-the-ground work. This could possibly be tied in with annual review processes already in place by some education providers like EnviroSchools.

Drawing upon the depiction of sustainable ecosystem functioning, partnerships amongst humans can be viewed from an ecological perspective. In this way, the elements of interdependent relationships, communicative feedback loops, cooperation, flexibility, and diversity are seen as essential to building partnerships that are enduring and effective. Specific recommendations for developing, implementing and maintaining a partnership as based on an ecological model is provided by (DePetris, 2016, pp. 47-51), while the Department of Conservation (2017a, pp. 16-25) and Ministry of Education (2020) also provide general guidance and frameworks. The development of the local community group, WAO, through an ecosystem partnership model, may also serve as a useful case study and/or opportunity for tapping into additional relevant expertise.

Recommendation 3: Coordinate focused, manageable action

It will be vital for the working group to collectively determine the amount of collaborative work that is manageable and affordable on top of the other essential work affiliated with their respective roles. The more upfront and transparent representatives can be about this matter, the better. Starting small in 2023 should be perceived positively as building trust through an effective partnership is the paramount objective at this early stage. A strong foundation for place-based collaboration in years to come will be laid if the working group can prioritise time to work together under the same ‘roof’ and celebrate the success of collectively delivering some tangible, educational opportunities, for both schools and the wider community.

A great deal of feedback about what support schools want has already been collected through the scoping project, with clear signalling for:

- Developing a system for improving awareness about educational providers and their offerings through a shared platform (e.g., website and/or an calendar);
- Teacher professional learning opportunities, including more knowledge around the history and mātauraka of mana whenua;

- Developing real-life learning opportunities through environmental and sustainability projects within school grounds and beyond school boundaries; and
- Opportunities to collaborate with other educational organisations.

Many other ideas were shared by both education providers and teachers through the blue-sky brainstorming session are outlined in Appendix F. These ideas could be used as a foundation to explore future projects in more detail with schools, possibly through a short online survey or morning tea visit.

The working group should also consider how they might best leverage off the already high number of community events as offered through local providers, as well curriculum initiatives and trends as prescribed by the Ministry of Education. One such example is the need for schools to commence integration of the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories curriculum in 2023.

At this time, no one 'backbone' organisation is expected to lead the development of this initial partnership tasked with increasing networking, coordination and collaboration. With respect to working to strengths, different organisations and representatives will take the lead for different projects. However, as based on experiences of the *Taupō Environmental Education Collaborative*, it is recommended that a regular meeting venue is organised, and two individuals assume the responsibility of meeting facilitator/chair person and note-taker. An upfront, annual contribution from each organisation of \$200 (when possible) is also useful for covering general costs, while costs for additional event-related expenses are worked out on an as-need basis. Simple actions like these will do much to increase the group's efficiency going forward.

Recommendation 4: Strategies for increasing capacity and capability 2024+

Policy development in a democratic society relies on an educated electorate that provides the government with a sustained mandate to act. Voter education is therefore crucial for the stability and successful enactment of policy that can deal to the socio-ecological crises of our time.

There is a strong correlation between education and concern for the environment and social justice (Santone, 2018) and the development of relevant skills (i.e., problem solving /critical thinking) and behaviours (i.e. individual and collective actions) (Nairn, 2019). Effective environmental and sustainability education has a significant role to play as a catalyst for positive change from current extractive, ecologically degrading practices to regenerative, nature-based futures. Education offers:

- agency to change societal attitudes, behaviours and expectations, while ensuring people are capable to take action for the tangible benefit of the environment and humanity;

- a ripple effect from the individual learner to others such as families, whānau and the wider community; and
- the opportunity to identify and debate myths and misleading information regarding wicked, socio-ecological issues.

Short-term, reactive and/or regulatory responses will not address the symptoms of wicked problems like climate change. Significant community buy-in for long term strategies that address root causes will be needed for implementing the systemic changes as envisioned by policy like the *Climate and Biodiversity Plan 2022-2025* (Queenstown Lakes District Council, 2022). To date, widespread support from educational leaders in schools and communities for educating on behalf of such a response has been lacking (Kwauk, 2020).

This recommendation posits the centrality, coherence and coordination of education efforts as part of the long-term response to these problems. To foster the emergence of a regenerative and sustainable future, more organisational capacity is required to drive and coordinate partnerships for the inclusion of an educational response. Through this scoping project, representatives from WAI Wānaka, WAO and Te Kākano Aotearoa Trust shared snippets of their respective organisation's experiences and expertise in relation to theory of change, and accompanying logic and ecological partnership models. Expertise from these groups should be steered into an ancillary group for considering the development of a high-level strategy for securing more funding to formalise partnerships and increase organisational capacity for environmental and sustainability education. Some key questions to help frame this strategic discussion are:

1. What impact do our environmental and sustainability education partnerships seek to make? Over what time-period?
2. What outcomes will achieve this impact (e.g., developing connection, knowledge, skills, motivation)?
3. What outputs (e.g., activities, programmes, events) will most effectively achieve these outcomes?
4. Who are the target audiences?
5. How will we measure, monitor and demonstrate progress?

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